

The Light in the Clearing

A TALE of the NORTH COUNTRY in the TIME of SILAS WRIGHT

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CHAPTER X.

A Party and—My Fourth Peril?

It was a rainy Sunday. In the middle of the afternoon Uncle Peabody and I had set out in our spring buggy with the family umbrella—a faded but sacred implement, always carefully dried, after using, and hung in the clothes press. We were drenched to the skin in spite of the umbrella. It was still raining when we arrived at the familiar door in Ashery lane. Uncle Peabody wouldn't stop.

He hurried away. We pioneers rarely stopped or even turned out for the weather.

"Come in," said the voice of the schoolmaster at the door. "There's good weather under this roof."

He saw my plight as I entered. "I'm like a shaggy dog that's been in swimming," I said.

"Upon my word, boy, we're in luck," remarked the schoolmaster.

I looked up at him. "Michael Henry's clothes!—sure, they're just the thing for you!"

I followed him upstairs, wondering how it had happened that Michael Henry had clothes.

He took me into his room and brought some handsome, soft clothes out of a press with shirt, socks and boots to match.

"There, my liddle buck," said he, "put them on."

"These will soon dry on me," I said. "Put them on—ye laggard! Michael Henry told me to give them to you. It's the birthday night o' little Ruth, my boy. There's a big cake with candles and chicken pie and jellied cookies and all the like o' that. Put them on. A wet boy at the feast would dampen the whole proceedings."

I put them on and with a great sense of relief and comfort. They were an admirable fit—too perfect for an accident, although at the time I thought only of their grandeur as I stood surveying myself in the looking-glass. They were of blue cloth and I saw that they went well with my blond hair and light skin. I was putting on my collar and necktie when Mr. Hacket returned.

We went below and the table was very grand with its great fringed cake and its candles, in shiny brass sticks, and its jellies and preserves with the gleam of polished pewter among them. Mrs. Hacket and all the children, save Ruth, were waiting for us in the dining room.

"Now sit down here, all o' ye, with Michael Henry," said the schoolmaster. "The little lady will be impatient. I'll go and get her and God help us to make her remember the day."

He was gone a moment, only, when he came back with Ruth in lovely white dress and slippers and gay with ribbons, and the silver beads of Mary on her neck. We clapped our hands and cheered and, in the excitement of the moment, John tipped over his drinking glass and shattered it on the floor.

"Never mind, my brave lad—no glass ever perished in a better cause. God bless you!"

We ate and jested and talked, and the sound of our laughter drowned the cry of the wind in the chimney and the drumming of the rain upon the windows.

Next morning my clothes, which had been hung by the kitchen stove, were damp and wrinkled. Mr. Hacket came to my room before I had risen.

"Michael Henry would rather see his clothes hanging on a good boy than on a nail in the closet," said he. "Sure they give no comfort to the nail at all."

"I guess mine are dry now," I answered.

"They're wet and heavy, boy. No son o' Baldur could keep a light heart in them. Sure ye'd be as much out o' place as a sunbeam in a cave o' bats. If ye care not for your own comfort think o' the poor lad in the green chair. He's that proud and pleased to see them on ye it would be a shame to reject his offer. Sure, if they were dry yer own garments would be good enough, God knows, but Michael Henry loves the look o' ye in these gowns, and then the president is in town."

That evening he discovered a big stain, black as ink, on my coat and trousers. Mr. Hacket expressed the opinion that it might have come from the umbrella, but I am quite sure that he had spotted them to save me from the last homemade suit I ever wore, save in rough work, and keep Michael Henry's on my back. In any event I wore them no more save at chore time.

Sally came and went, with the Willis boys, and gave no heed to me. In her eyes I had no more substance than a ghost, it seemed to me, although I caught her, often, looking at me. I judged that her father had given her a bad report of us and had some regrets, in spite of my knowledge that we were right, although they related mostly to Amos.

Next afternoon I saw Mr. Wright and the president walking back and forth on the bridge as they talked together. A number of men stood in front of the blacksmith shop, by the river shore, watching them, as I guessed, on my way to the mill on an

errand. The two statesmen were in broadcloth and white linen and beaver hats. They stopped as I approached them.

"Well, partner, we shall be leaving in an hour or so," said Mr. Wright as he gave me his hand. "You may look for me here soon after the close of the session. Take care of yourself and go often to see Mrs. Wright and obey your captain and remember me to your aunt and uncle."

"See that you keep coming, my good boy," said the president as he gave me his hand, with playful reference, no doubt, to Mr. Wright's remark that I was a coming man.

"Bart, I've some wheat to be thrashed in the barn on the back lot," said the senator as I was leaving them. "You can do it Saturdays, if you care to, at a shilling an hour. Stack the straw out of doors until you've finished, then put it back in the bay. Winnow the wheat carefully and sack it and bring it down to the granary and I'll settle with you when I return."

I remember that a number of men who worked in Grimshaw's sawmill were passing as he spoke.

"Yes, sir," I answered, much elated by the prospect of earning money.

The examination of Amos was set down for Monday and the people of the village were stirred and shaken by wildest rumors regarding the evidence to be adduced. Every day men and women stopped me in the street to ask what I knew of the murder. I followed the advice of Bishop Perkins and kept my knowledge to myself.

Saturday came, and when the chores were done I went alone to the grain barn in the back lot of the senator's farm with flail and measure and broom and fork and shovel and sacks and my luncheon, in a pushcart, with all of which Mrs. Wright had provided me.

It was a lonely place with woods on three sides of the field and a road on the other. I kept laying down beds of wheat on the barn floor and beating them out with the flail until the sun was well over the roof, when I sat down to eat my luncheon. Then I kept up the grain and winnowed my out the chaff and filled one of my sacks. That done, I covered the flail again and the thump of the flail eased my loneliness until in the middle of the afternoon two of my schoolmates came and asked me to go swimming with them. The river was not forty rods away and a good trail led to the swimming hole. It was a warm, bright day and I was hot and thirsty. The thought of cool waters and friendly companionship was too much for me. I went with them and stayed with them longer than I intended. I remember saying as I dressed that I should have to work late and go without my supper in order to finish my stint.

It was almost dark when I was putting the last sack of wheat into my cart, in the gloomy barn and getting ready to go.

A rustling in the straw where I stood stopped me suddenly. I heard stealthy footsteps in the darkness. I stood my ground and demanded: "Who's there?"

I saw a form approaching in the gloom with feet as noiseless as a cat's.

I had Time to Raise My Flail and Bring It Down Upon the Head of the Leader.

I took a step backward and, seeing that it was a woman, stopped.

"It's Kate," came in a hoarse whisper as I recognized her form and staff.

"Run, boy—they have just come out o' the woods. I saw them. They will take you away. Run."

She had picked up the flail, and now she put it in my hands and gave me a push toward the door. I ran, and none too quickly, for I had not gone fifty feet from the barn in the stubble when I heard them coming after me, whoever they were. I saw that they were gaining and turned quickly. I had time to raise my flail and bring it down upon the head of the leader,

who fell as I had seen a beef fall under the ax. Another man stopped beyond the reach of my flail and, after a second's hesitation, turned and ran away in the darkness.

I could hear or see no other motion in the field. I turned and ran on down the slope toward the village. In a moment I saw someone coming out of the maple grove at the field's end, just ahead, with a lantern.

Then I heard the voice of the schoolmaster saying: "Is it you, my lad?"

"Yes," I answered, as I came up to him and Mary, in a condition of breathless excitement.

I told them of the curious adventure I had had.

"Come quick," said the schoolmaster. "Let's go back and find the man in the stubble."

I remembered that I had struck the path in my flight just before stopping to swing the flail. The man must have fallen very near it. Soon we found where he had been lying and drops of fresh blood on the stubble.

"Hush," said the schoolmaster. We listened and heard a wagon rattling at a wild pace down the road toward the river.

"There he goes," said Mr. Hacket. "His companions have carried him away. Ye'd be riding in that wagon now, yourself, my brave lad, if ye hadn't 'a' made a lucky hit with the flail—God bless ye!"

"What would they 'a' done with me?" I asked.

"Oh, I reckon they'd 'a' took ye off, lad, and kep' ye for a year or so until Amos was out o' danger," said Mr. Hacket. "Maybe they'd drowned ye in the river down there an' left yer clothes on the bank to make it look like an honest drowning. The devil knows what they'd 'a' done with ye, liddle buck. We'll have to keep an eye on ye now, every day until the trial is over—sure we will. Come, we'll go up to the barn and see if Kate is there."

Just then we heard the receding wagon go roaring over the bridge on Little river. Mary shuddered with fright. The schoolmaster reassured us by saying:

"Don't be afraid. I brought my gun in case we'd meet a painter. But the painter is past."

He drew a long pistol from his coat pocket and held it in the light of the lantern.

The loaded cart stood in the middle of the barn floor, where I had left it, but old Kate had gone. We closed the barn, drawing the cart along with us. When we came into the edge of the village I began to reflect upon the strange peril out of which I had so luckily escaped. It gave me a heavy sense of responsibility and of the wickedness of men.

I thought of old Kate and her broken silence. For once I had heard her speak. I could feel my flesh tingle when I thought of her quick words and her hoarse, passionate whisper.

I knew, or thought I knew, why she took such care of me. She was in league with the gallows and could not bear to see it cheated of its prey. For some reason she hated the Grimshaws. I had seen the hate in her eyes the day she dogged along behind the old money lender through the streets of the village when her pointing finger had seemed to say to me: "There, there is the man who has brought me to this. He has put these rags upon my back, this fire in my heart, this wild look in my eyes. Wait and you will see what I will put upon him."

I knew that old Kate was not the irresponsible, wild creature that people thought her to be. I had begun to think of her with a kind of awe as one gifted above all others. One by one the things she had said of the future seemed to be coming true.

As we were going into the house the schoolmaster said:

"Now, Mary, you take this lantern and go across the street to the house o' Deacon Binks, the constable. You'll find him asleep by the kitchen stove. Arrest his slumbers, but not rudely, and when he has come to, tell him that I have news o' the devil."

Deacon Binks arrived, a fat man with a big, round body and a very wise and serious countenance between side whiskers bending from his temple to his neck and suggesting parentheses of hair, as if his head and its accessories were in the nature of a slide issue. He and the schoolmaster went out of doors and must have talked together while I was eating a bowl of bread and milk which Mrs. Hacket had brought to me.

When I went to bed, by and by, I heard somebody snoring on the little porch under my window. The first sound that reached my ear at the break of dawn was the snoring of some sleeper. I dressed and went below and found the constable in his coonskin overcoat asleep on the porch with a long-barreled gun at his side. While I stood there the schoolmaster came around the corner of the house from the garden. He put his hand on the deacon's shoulder and gave him a little shake.

"Awake, ye limb o' the law," he demanded. "Prayer is better than sleep."

The deacon arose and stretched

himself and cleared his throat and assumed an air of alertness and said it was a fine morning, which it was not, the sky being overcast and the air dark and chilly. Mr. Hacket removed his greatcoat and threw it on the stoop saying:

"Deacon, you lay there. From now on I'm constable and ready for any act that may be necessary to maintain the law. I can be as severe as Napoleon Bonaparte and as cunning as Satan, if I have to be."

While I was milking the deacon sat on a bucket in the doorway of the stable and snored until I had finished. He awoke when I loosed the cow and the constable went back to the pasture with me, yawning with his hand over his mouth much of the way. The deacon leaned his elbow on the top of the pen and snored again, lightly, while I mixed the feed for the pigs.

Mr. Hacket met us at the kitchen door, where Deacon Binks said to him: "If you'll look after the boy today I'll go home and get a little rest."

"God bless yer soul, ye had a busy night," said the schoolmaster with a smile.

He added as he went into the house: "I never knew a man to rest with more energy and persistence. It was a perfect flood o' rest. It kept me awake until long after midnight."

CHAPTER XI.

The Spirit of Michael Henry and Others.

At the examination of Amos Grimshaw my knowledge was committed to the records and ceased to be a source of danger to me. Grimshaw came to the village that day. On my way to the courtroom I saw him walking



"Awake, Ye Limb o' the Law."

slowly, with bent head as I had seen him before, followed by old Kate. She carried her staff in her left hand while the forefinger of her right hand was pointing him out. Silent as a ghost and as unheeded—one would say—she followed his steps.

I observed that old Kate sat on a front seat with her hand to her ear and Grimshaw beside his lawyer at a big table and that when she looked at him her lips moved in a strange unuttered whisper of her spirit. Her face filled with joy as one damning detail after another came out in the evidence.

The facts hereinbefore alleged, and others, were proved, for the tracks fitted the shoes of Amos. The young man was held and presently indicted. The time of his trial was not determined.

I wrote a good hand those days and the leading merchant of the village engaged me to post his books every Saturday at ten cents an hour. Thenceforward until Christmas I gave my free days to that task. I estimated the sum that I should earn and planned to divide it in equal parts and proudly present it to my aunt and uncle on Christmas day.

One Saturday while I was at work on the big ledger of the merchant I ran upon this item:

October 3.—S. Wright—To one suit of clothes for Michael Henry from measures furnished by S. Robinson. \$14.50

Shirts to match 1.75

I knew then the history of the suit of clothes which I had worn since that rainy October night, for I remembered that Sam Robinson, the tailor, had measured me at our house and made up the cloth of Aunt Deel's weaving.

I observed, also, that numerous articles—a load of wood, two sacks of flour, three pairs of boots, one coat, ten pounds of salt pork and four bushels of potatoes—all for "Michael Henry"—had been charged to Silas Wright.

So by the merest chance I learned that the invisible "Michael Henry" was the almoner of the modest statesman and really the spirit of Silas Wright feeding the hungry and clothing the naked and warming the cold house, in the absence of its owner. It was the heart of Wright joined to that of the schoolmaster, which sat in the green chair.

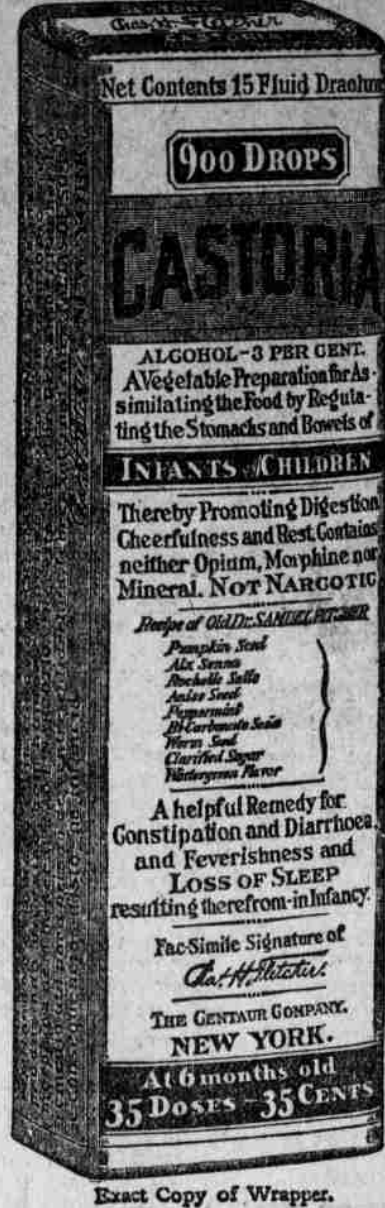
I fear that my work suffered a moment's interruption, for just then I began to know the great heart of the senator. Its warmth was in the clothing that covered my back, its delicacy in the ignorance of those who had shared its benefactions.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Its Effect.

"They say the American doughnut is making a big hit with the French."

"Yes, it's just pie for them."



CASTORIA

For Infants and Children.

Mothers Know That Genuine Castoria

Always Bears the Signature of

of

In Use

For Over

Thirty Years

CASTORIA

MEANS DEATH OF GRAMMAR

New hue Which Has Abolished Formal and Elaborate English Style of Former Days.

English as commonly written today certainly seems to have lost the purity and strength that it had a century ago, observes the Spokane Spokesman Review. Then such masters of the language as Cobbe, Coleridge, DeQuincey or Hazlitt were journalists as well as poets or essayists, and their leading articles lost nothing of effect on the public from being literature.

The arrival of the age of steam, electricity and cheap postage was followed by a change, not for the better, in the popular style of speaking and writing.

"Say what you have to say as briefly and quickly as possible, and don't bother about fineness of expression," became the general rule and practice.

The new millions of readers demanded that their reading be expressed in the language of every-day speech. The obligation of compressing conclusions about important matters into 1,000 words, or fewer, is death, in the end, to style. The literary form favored is in touch with the turned-up-trousers fashion of wearing one's clothing. It is free and easy and crammed with linguistic atrocities. Plural subjects are polygamously wedded to singular verbs, and Lindley Murray turns in his grave on account of the death of grammar.

He Can't Now.

Some years ago some genius introduced a bill compelling everybody to qualify physically and mentally for marriage. Unfortunately, it was lost in committee; it should have gone through. The necessity of it was disclosed in a Main street car last evening when seven or nine of us heard a prospective bridegroom coyly confess he was indeed "about to become a benedictine."—Buffalo News.

Time waits for no man, but the musical director can beat it.

For a Rainy Day.

Catherine—How many dozen potato bugs did you get today, Martha?

Martha (the youngest)—Papa owes me 20 cents. I got twenty dozen.

Catherine—I beat you! I got thirty dozen. We must be careful an' not spoil the little yellow things on the leaves, Martha, 'cause they're eggs.

The occasional use of Roman Eye Balsam at night upon retiring will prevent and relieve tired, watery eyes, and eye strain. Adv.

STILL FAITHFUL TO STUARTS?

Pretender of that Line to Britain's Throne Is Now Prince Rupert of Bavaria.

There was once to be found in Britain a little group of romantic sentimentalists who remained faithful to the Stuart line, and celebrated on January 30 a kind of Jacobite feast day.

A writer in Living Age remembers seeing postage stamps bearing the likeness of the "pretender," who happened to be a princess of Bavaria. These were attached to the envelope by the side of the official postage stamp, thus constituting a source of annoyance to the serious minded Victoria.

Since the death of his mother, Maria Theresa of Bavaria, a few weeks ago, ex-Prince Rupert of Bavaria is now the official Stuart pretender to the throne of Great Britain. The muse of history has ever had a leaning toward irony.

Hard Drink Seller, but Safe.

"There goes a man who lives on water all the year round."

"Pshaw! That's impossible."

"Oh no, it isn't. He cuts it and stores it in winter and sells it in summer."—Boston Evening Transcript.

Mistaken.

"Why did you call your mother when I tried to kiss you?" "I—I—I—I didn't think she was in the house."

The thumb is stronger than all the fingers together.

When You're Tired

and need the invigoration of a well-flavored, full-bodied hot cup, there's nothing superior to

Postum Cereal

Delicious and healthful, it supports and cheers with its refreshing goodness, and it is an economical table drink as well.

At Grocers.

Two sizes, usually sold at 15c and 25c